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TRAINING FOR BUSINESS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Training for business at the University of Wisconsin is carried on through the agency of the Course in Commerce, the business-training branch of the Extension Division, and the College of Engineering. The Course in Commerce, or, as it was formerly called, the School of Commerce, began its career at the opening of the academic year 1900-1901. Preceding this event was a considerable period of agitation and discussion in the faculty, the Board of Regents, and outside the walls of the University. Since this agitation and discussion determined to some extent the character of the course which was established, some account of it is necessary.

Being a state institution, the University of Wisconsin is and always has been subject to the influence of public opinion, and, being the head of the system of public education in the state, it has felt responsible for the training of all classes of the state's citizens and, in some degree, for what takes place in the educational field outside as well as inside its own walls. From the beginning of its history it devoted a large part of its energy and resources to the improvement of agriculture in the state and to the training of farmers. Later it undertook the training of lawyers, pharmacists, and engineers. With the University thus interested from the beginning in vocational training, and to some extent at least devoted to it, it was inevitable that sooner or later people concerned for other vocations than those which were specifically provided for should inquire regarding what the institution was doing for them and what it might do and ought to do.

Such an inquiry was early made by prominent business men, and in one or two instances at least by members of the Board of Regents. To these inquiries the representatives of the University at first replied that the training supplied by its College of Letters and Science was the best for prospective business men that could be devised. In common with professional educators elsewhere, the faculty of the University, a large majority of them at

least, believed this to be true; and when hard pressed by incredulous business men, they talked learnedly about the value of a liberal education, and about the place which the ancient classics, the modern languages, mathematics, pure science, and, in general, study for its own sake, especially when entirely disassociated from practical ends, must occupy in such an education. In spite of their strength and of the elements of truth they contained, these arguments never appealed to those business men who had learned to appreciate the importance of education as a business asset. They had in mind specific defects in themselves and their employees which they wanted remedied, and they noted the fact that these defects were nearly, if not quite, as common among graduates of the University's College of Letters and Science as among people who had not had the advantage of its training. Further, they noted a disinclination on the part of college graduates, those of the University included, to submit meekly to the discipline which the learning of business by practice involved. Some business men went so far as to claim that the College of Letters and Science not only did not train for business, but actually spoiled good business material.

This controversy, if such it may be called, worked out a solution of the problem in a very natural, though unexpected and unplanned-for, way. Students who entered the University with the intention of becoming business men, as well as their parents, guardians, and teachers, began to study the curriculum of the University in its various colleges and departments, with the result that they discovered that in the aggregate there were being given a large number of courses which were clearly valuable from the standpoint of business training. Some of these were offered in the College of Law, others in the College of Engineering, others in the College of Agriculture, and some even in the College of Letters and Science. As the four-year courses leading to degrees were then organized, only a few of these courses were available to any one student, and the prospective young business man was obliged, therefore, to choose between those offered in the different colleges and various four-year courses of the College of Letters and Science. He naturally chose the one that

offered the most of what he wanted and the least of what he did not want.

One way out was discovered by the most earnest and ingenious students, namely, that of registering as special students, not candidates for any degree, and then selecting the courses good for purposes of business training regardless of the college or department in which they were given. There were, of course, obstacles in the way of this method of procedure in the form of regulations regarding students in one college taking work in another, prerequisite courses, etc., but the pressure to modify these regulations became stronger and stronger, as the number of this class of students increased, until it was finally irresistible.

Still another condition developed which had its influence. The conviction began to make way in University circles closely in touch with the secondary schools, that large numbers of young men, not infrequently the best graduates of high schools, were foregoing the advantages of a college course simply because the University did not cater to the real needs of prospective business men. Investigation established beyond a question the fact that from the high schools of the state there were going directly into business hundreds of bright young graduates, who were perfectly able financially to take a university course and who in many cases had been destined by their parents for such a course, but who were turned away from it by the conviction that the university had nothing for them really worth while.

As a result of these influences, by 1900 the University found itself occupying an untenable position on the subject of training for business. Its colleges of Engineering, Law, and Agriculture each contained a considerable and growing number of students who never intended to be engineers, lawyers, or farmers, but who had selected these colleges because of the courses in them which had a more or less direct relation to business training. Its College of Letters and Science had also, in each of its four-year courses, a growing group of students with such business interests, and a large and troublesome group of special students who were picking and choosing for themselves and constantly hammering away at the artificial regulations they found in their way. The University was

also painfully conscious of failing in its duty toward the class of young high-school graduates whom I have described, who were kept away from its classrooms by the conviction, shared to an increasing extent each year by thoughtful business men and high-school teachers, that the University had little of value to offer them.

The School of Commerce was the plan devised by the University to meet this condition of affairs. It was the result of an endeavor to make a four-year undergraduate course, parallel with the other four-year courses leading to degrees, which would do for the prospective business man what the four-year long course in agriculture, the engineering courses, the law course, and the course in pharmacy were doing or attempting to do for men who were planning to enter as a vocation, after leaving college, agriculture, engineering, law, or pharmacy. It is to the development and improvement of such a course that the greater portion of our energy and resources devoted to business training has been given ever since.

In constructing such a course the views of our faculty regarding the essentials of a college course leading to a Bachelor's degree had to be met. Fortunately on this subject these views had been considerably liberalized by the agitation that had preceded, and were destined to become still more liberal each succeeding year. After incorporating in the curriculum certain courses, regarded as fundamental, though considerably modified subsequently, the better to adapt them to the special needs of practical men, an attempt was made to correlate the courses valuable for business training already given in the various colleges and departments. This attempt revealed a wealth of appropriate educational resources—greater probably than anyone previously had known, or supposed, to exist—and at the same time obvious gaps and maladjustments. To fill up these gaps and remove these maladjustments has been the principal task of the administrative officers of this course from that time to this. A few illustrations of what we have attempted with more or less success must suffice.

Such subjects as accounting and business administration were not included in the curriculum of any of our colleges in 1900. Indeed, the average member of our faculty regarded them as

business-college subjects, unworthy of a place in the curriculum of a college. Furthermore, suitable teachers of these subjects were not to be found.

The limits of this paper will not permit me to describe the means we have employed for the breaking down of this faculty prejudice. Suffice it to say that even at the present time our beginning courses in accounting and business administration are not allowed to be counted toward the Bachelor's degree. They have to be taken as extras, thus, rendering the number of credits required for graduation in the Commerce course greater than in the other courses of the College of Letters and Science. But advanced courses in accounting are now recognized by practically all the members of our faculty as fully up to college grade, and a great demand for them, even under the handicap of a year's prerequisite work without credit, has arisen outside the Commerce course, in some cases even among graduate students.

The problem of finding suitable teachers was solved only after great effort, much experimentation, and great travail of soul. In this particular we are fairly well off at the present time, but good teachers of this subject are still so rare throughout the country that we live in constant fear of losing the men we have acquired with so much effort. Fortunately, we have been able to make some contributions to the supply in the persons of our own graduates.

The subject of business administration has been kept so far with us within the limits of a single course of two hours per week for one year. We expect soon to develop it into probably four semester courses and one full-year course which we may entitle, respectively, Business Organization, Marketing Methods, Industrial Management, Credits and Collections, and Practical Advertising.¹ We have the material and the teachers for these courses, but we have not yet found a place for them in our curriculum.

¹The content of these courses may briefly be described as follows:

Business organization.—A foundational course treating the history and present forms of business organization in the United States. It would include a historical sketch of the various stages through which the organization of industry, commerce, and agriculture have passed in this country, a comparison with foreign development, the interrelations of governmental activities and the forms of business organization,

We early discovered maladjustment, as well as inadequacy, from the standpoint of training for business, in our courses in English. We began by requiring commerce students to take the regular training course in English required of all Freshmen. Tests of various kinds later applied revealed the fact that men, who had satisfactorily met all the requirements of this course, could not meet the requirements which any good business establishment imposes upon people whom it intrusts with its correspondence. The outcome of this revelation has been the development of an additional year's course in commercial correspondence, a course which like many others was brought to a satisfactory state only after a large amount of experimentation and research and considerable expenditure of money.

Other curriculum problems which we have had to solve have arisen in connection with the teaching of the modern languages

the relation of community life and community prosperity to the individual business unit, city and district promotion, forms of organization of the individual business unit, methods of promoting a new business organization, and internal organization of a business unit. Two hours per week. One semester.

Marketing methods.—Organization of domestic and foreign markets; methods of distribution from the standpoint of the manufacturer, wholesaler, and retailer; the relation of the various classes of distributors, the relative advantages of the various methods of distribution open to each class and methods that have proven successful in practice; organization of sales departments, including plans of campaigns and management of the various factors upon which success or failure of a selling venture depend; and methods of reaching foreign markets. Two hours per week. One semester.

Industrial management.—Organization and Management of factories, including such topics as lay-out of factories, location of plants, departmentation, shop management and organization, the old system *versus* the staff-and-line system, relation of efficiency movements and labor organizations, wage-payment plans; and typical manufacturing industries each treated from the standpoint of raw materials, location, methods of management, recent changes, and outlook. Two hours per week. One semester.

Credits and collections.—Function of credit in business; the credit system; credit organization of typical business houses; methods of keeping records, etc. Two hours per week. One semester.

Practical advertising.—A laboratory course in the laying out of advertising campaigns, and in writing advertisements. Co-operation with all University publications as a means of securing actual material. The course would be open only to students who have had the course we now offer on the psychology of advertising and the above-mentioned course on marketing methods. It would be designed for the training of persons who expect to enter advertising as a profession. Two hours per week. One year.

for business purposes, and the development of special courses in the interests of business training in mathematics, history, political economy, political science, law, and engineering.

While curriculum problems have chiefly occupied us we have had others, and new ones are constantly appearing. Early in the history of the course we discovered that only a relatively small percentage of those who entered as Freshmen continued to graduation. The percentages for each year to date are as follows: The first entering class, finishing in 1904, graduated 25.8 per cent of its members; the class of 1905, 30 per cent; that of 1906, 34.9 per cent; that of 1907, 32.3 per cent; that of 1908, 25.2 per cent; that of 1909, 31.3 per cent; that of 1910, 43.4 per cent; that of 1911, 26.7 per cent; and that of 1912, 30.5 per cent. Of all the Freshmen who entered the course up to and including the class of 1912, 30.8 per cent graduated.

A careful investigation of this matter showed that a very few had transferred to other courses in the University; a small number had fallen by the wayside because of inability to do the work, but the vast majority had left after one or two years to go into business. Some of these had entered upon their studies with the intention of remaining one or two years only; others had been tempted to leave by attractive business offers or by changes in circumstances after entering the course.

This condition of affairs raised the question whether we were doing our entire duty by the 70 per cent who stay with us one or two years only. The feeling that we were not has been fostered by a constantly increasing demand from students of this class to reverse the order of our curriculum, the studies they particularly want being as a rule placed in the Junior and Senior years. Such a procedure being impossible, such students are forced to devote the greater part of the time they spend in the University in the study of subjects, the bearing of which on their work in the world is indirect only. As a basis for studies of a more or less specialized and vocational character, the work prescribed for our Freshman and Sophomore years may be defended, but it can hardly be defended as a course complete in itself and suitable as a preparation for a business career.

The solution of this problem seems to be a two-year course, suitable for high-school graduates and vocational in its character. So far we have been deterred from the establishment of such a course by the fear of being overwhelmed with first- and second-year students. The attendance at our University has increased so rapidly of late years that we have been obliged to take measures to provide facilities for the training of Freshmen and Sophomores in our normal schools, and to encourage a larger portion of the students of this grade to attend the smaller colleges of the state. The establishment of one- or two-year business courses for high-school graduates in our state in the near future, however, seems to me inevitable and highly desirable.

The University of Wisconsin has also been obliged to face the problem of providing training for people who are already in business but who need and wish additional vocational instruction. Since the city of Madison, in which the University is located, is a small town, and since the scope of the University's duties is state wide, this problem could not be solved by a local night-school such as is so successfully carried on in connection with the New York University, with Northwestern University, and with the University of Pennsylvania. Instead we established a business-training section in our Extension Division, and are now conducting a large number of specialized courses for business men in every important city of the state. These courses are accompanied by correspondence work carried on from the University as a center. The staff employed in this work is nearly as large as that of the Commerce course. Many of these courses are more highly specialized than are suitable for students of the Commerce course; some of them are more advanced in character and others much more elementary.

For many years our College of Engineering has felt the need of special business training for its graduates, and to this end has made use of the facilities offered by the Course in Commerce. A joint five-year course in Engineering and Commerce was arranged several years ago; special courses for engineers have been developed; and the regular courses for commerce students have been

arranged to meet so far as possible the schedule and other requirements of the College of Engineering.

At Wisconsin we feel that we have made only a fair start in the solution of the knotty problems of training for business, but we are encouraged over the progress already made and hopeful of the future. We feel sure that we now have something worth while for the prospective business man. The graduates of our Commerce course are in great demand, and with few exceptions have "made good." They are practically unanimous in the feeling that the Commerce course has been a large factor in whatever success they have achieved, and their employers as a rule send back for more of the same kind.

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